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THE COLUMBIA PARK BOYS' CLUB OF SAN FRANCISCO.

SOME twelve or fourteen years ago, a few young men in San Francisco conceived the idea of going into one of the poorer, crowded quarters of the city and seeing what they could do for the boys of the neighborhood. There is something original, live, spontaneous, and interesting about a boy that appealed to them, and they liked boys anyway.

They formed a club just for boys. The club became strong, and its fame spread so that it was known in many cities for its remarkable work. Then these young men drifted apart. One went to New York and interested himself in boys' work there. Others traveled and studied, and one began to write about purple cows and chewing-gum men and things, and became famous.

The founders and original spirits were thus gradually called away into other vocations which absorbed their time and thoughts, and the club itself fell under different management. It lost its distinctive features, most of its strongest workers, and its power with boys. By good fortune, however, a seed had been sown in the mind of one of the principal men who had become interested in the club. The spirit possessed him that he should stay in boys' work. He received a call to go to New York to take charge of some work with boys carried on there by a large association. After trying this for a year, he became dissatisfied with their methods. There was too much of the institution and machine about it, and he did not believe that strong work was possible under its plan of organization. Though offered a large salary to remain, he quietly wended his way back to the balmy air, the open skies, and the mountain aromas of California, his native state. Here, in San Francisco, he gathered together an association and organized a boys' club on his own lines, according to the tried methods which had

before made the old San Francisco Boys' Club famous among all the initiated.

Sidney S. Peixotto is the name of the young gentleman who thus, in December, 1895, organized the Columbia Park Boys' Club. His motto is "strong work." Applied to boys' club work it means work that gets hold of a boy, keeps hold of him, and counts in the development of his character. The keystone or arch about which the club is built, again, which distinguishes it from most other organized efforts for the training or education of boys with which the writer happens to be familiar, including the work of public or charitable institutions for boys and the public schools, is *individual work*. It recognizes and gives the most important place in its plans to the needs and demands of individual boys for personal training or education according to their individual bent. In like manner, and closely associated with this, the value is recognized and the power utilized that come from intimate personal acquaintance and close, refined, sympathetic personal influence.

It will appear as we proceed how these ideas are worked out in the organization and conduct of the club. But we may mention here a few essential features that make toward this end :

1. There is concentration on boys' work.
2. There is the right kind of man at the head of it, who gets to know all the boys personally, makes the club his business, puts his life into it, and keeps personally in touch with all its departments of activity.
3. The boys have a separate individual house or home for themselves.
4. All the members are divided into smaller clubs, and these again, on every meeting night, into still smaller groups in separate rooms, where they are under the direction of selected workers.
5. Attention is paid to individual needs as far as possible in the gymnasium, under a paid instructor who devotes himself *entirely to physical culture for boys*.
6. The very best opportunity for individual work is given through the careful organization, direction, and supervision of the boys' games, sports, and recreation, in baseball, football, track athletics, charades and dramatics, cross-country walks, outings, and camping excursions, as well, also, as in the military organization.
7. The individual club itself is not too large and unwieldy for the personal management of one director.

The club is situated in one of the poorer districts of the city of San Francisco, in what is known as the section south of Market street. The immediate neighborhood of the club has the worst record on the books of the Associated Charities in that city. A friend, whose acquaintance I made in a can factory in the neighborhood where I worked a couple of months, informed me that one of the street corners opposite the club house had the "hardest name" of any locality in San Francisco. He knew because he had been a pretty hard case himself. Between this factory and a glass works opposite from 300 to 400 boys and girls of all ages are employed. Needless to say, these factories are most excellent schools of vice. The usual saloons appear at every street corner and side alley.

At No. 118 Seventh street in this district the Columbia Park Boys' Club has its home. Its 180 boy members are attracted from a radius of many blocks around. They range from eight or nine to sixteen or seventeen years of age. The house which was made over into a home for the club is raised from the ground so as to provide a good-sized basement. This basement is divided into two rooms, one used for a gymnasium, provided with its lockers, showers, and toilet, and the other as an armory. The next floor is provided with a little front parlor and reading-room with a library and all the current magazines, including some of the best art magazines. Back of that is a game- and play-room with chess and checker boards and parlor billiards, and a large closet where is stored a variegated supply of old costumes for the boys' private theatricals and charades. Then comes the meeting-room for the various clubs into which the 180 boys are divided, that assemble on the different evenings and afternoons in the week. The younger boys who go to school meet on the different afternoons, and the older and working boys in the evenings.

This assembly- or meeting-room is provided with benches rising in tiers one behind the other. A drop curtain is arranged so that it can cut off half of the room as a stage. Here the scenes in the charades, living pictures, and theatricals, the "club classics," are prepared, while the boys in the gallery outside

talk and amuse themselves with the workers as they wait for the performance to begin. Some amusements of this kind always form the concluding feature of every club meeting. First there is the business meeting, conducted in regular parliamentary order. Each little club of twenty or twenty-five boys has its own distinctive name, such as the Optimus Club, or the Lincoln Club, or the Vigilant Club, etc., and its own officers. The intercourse of the members with the workers in these business meetings is, of course, a great source of strength to the club. Hard knocks are given and taken here, and errors of judgment corrected. For example, when the baseball team of one of the evening clubs was defeated in one of the annual club tournaments, it was agreed in their business meeting at the beginning of the next year not to find any fault or kick at each other at any game.

The business meeting concluded, the members adjourn after being permitted to stretch their lusty young lungs with their individual club yell, finishing up with the Columbia Park Boys' Club yell. Having thus partially blown off pent-up energy and steam by hearty yells, they separate into still smaller groups of four to six boys each. These little groups go into rooms by themselves, each under the leadership of a chosen worker. These workers are older persons who have volunteered their services and give regularly at least one evening or afternoon a week to the club.

One group may go into the reception-room on the same floor in the extreme rear of the building. This is a large room with a big open fireplace where entertainments and Christmas receptions, etc., are held for parents and visiting friends. It has a piano. The group of boys here may be instructed in music, the choral society or glee club trained, or the band given an opportunity to blow its horns and fiddle under competent leadership. Another group, if it is the meeting night of the older boys, will be taken into the front parlor and reading-room and instructed in, and led to discuss, problems of municipal government.

Then the rest go upstairs, where the small-group idea is

still further carried out in the architectural arrangements. Outside of the manager's private office and another reading-room, and toilet, the whole floor is divided into seven or eight small shops and workrooms. One group of boys disappears in the printing shop in the rear of the building. These boys, who may perhaps be destined to become future Benjamin Franklins, seat themselves on high stools and go to work setting type or inking the printing press preparatory to getting out the monthly *Club News*, which sells at one cent a copy. The printing department is directed by the manager himself, who is an artist by nature, and one of whose strongest hobbies is artistic printing. But we will speak of this department again.

On looking around for the other groups, you will find the hall deserted and that all have disappeared in like manner into one or other of the different workshops. Each room is completely outfitted and equipped with benches, tools, etc., for whatever manual work is undertaken there. This is one of the principles of the manager. Only undertake any work in the club when you are ready to do it well and are sure you can make it "strong work." Thus some of the boys may be engaged in clay modeling, others in sloyd wood-work, art iron-working and designing, carpentering, rope-mat making, sewing and the rudiments of the tailor's trade, etc., etc. With each group, as has been stated, is some trained and intelligent older person patiently and affectionately watching, explaining, correcting, and encouraging. Those little fellows get to love that club. Playing hooky or truant is unheard of.

After an hour spent in this manner they all come together again downstairs and join in parlor games, amusements, and dramatics until it is time to go. As they file out through the hall, hats in hand, the manager stands there to give them a cheery good-bye, shaking each by the hand and calling each by name as he goes out. You know they will think of the meeting all the rest of the week, except when they are thinking of the next meeting or of some other activity in the club in which they are interested. Little animosities have been weeded out, advice given how little troubles may be overcome, cobwebs spun

over their young brains brushed away, a strong club spirit, which is the spirit of comradeship, of regard for your fellow, and the strength of unity, has been engendered, and a band of happy boys again tramps out running and calling upon the streets.

Not the least interesting or important feature of these meetings, however, is the lingering of some of the boys and workers after the rest have gone. These after-receptions always attract some of the brightest boys and strongest club members. Club spirit is talked over with the manager and workers present. Important facts and incidents in the club life are discussed, anecdotes related, the character, habits, and needs of the different boys discussed, and many a scheme invented for bringing back to reason an unruly member or wandering sheep. Some of the older boys who have taken most frequent part in these discussions show really remarkable insight into human nature, and soundness of judgment in estimating character, largely as a result of these informal conversational gatherings. A fine spirit prevails among the older boys of desire to help where help is needed in uplifting any of the other boys, and broad altruistic sentiments strongly prevail. This bringing about a spirit of fellowship, and making the boys love one another, is the greatest thing accomplished in the club, says the manager. The boys "really get to love something." "All the rest would not be worth anything if it had not done that much."

Believing in the silent influence of surroundings, the manager takes especial pains to establish firmly the art influence. "Everything the boys have," he says, "right down to their penholders, ought to be the best kind they can get. To me this is one of the first essentials in American education. This is one thing that the club is distinguished for in its home and surroundings. The boys understand this. Everything is 'swell.' Thus they come to take notice of the beauty of things."

It now becomes necessary to see the boys in their relations to the club in other boy activities. For the club does not, like the schools, stop its work with the members at 3 o'clock P. M., when school is out, nor is it like many institutions and training schools for boys that take hold of them with a military grasp

when necessary and leaves them to their own untutored devices where possible. But it enters heartily into all phases of the boy life, using his natural instinct for play as one of the most powerful means for gaining the boy's affections and educating him in self-control, acknowledgment of the rights of others, and generally in strong habits of right thought and conduct.

It is well recognized that one of the best means of strengthening moral character in a boy is to build up a sound body. A distinctive feature of this club in this field, however, is the concentration of the athletic instructor, Mr. William Hutton, on *physical culture for boys*. He has made a special study of this branch of physical culture and devotes himself to it entirely. He receives a salary by no means adequate for his services, but stays there giving practically all his time to the club, because of his love for the boys, and in the expectation that his special field of work will in time be appreciated and suitably rewarded.

The boys are divided into classes which meet the physical instructor on the different afternoons and evenings in the week. On account of the lack of facilities, any one boy can at present meet him only once a week. He treats the boys for physical defects that are common or peculiar to boys. Thus, for example, out of a class of eighteen boys on one occasion he observed that there were nine who had one shoulder from one-half inch to one inch lower than the other. So he has noticed that, particularly with boys under twelve years of age, when he tells them to rest, in the standing position, they almost always throw the weight of the body on the leg that is on the side of the low shoulder. He gives attention to cases of pigeon-toed, shambling, shuffly walk. They do not use the lower part of their lungs at all, he says, and generally breathe through the mouth. Cases of catarrh are very common among the boys in this locality, and can be corrected. He strengthens the abdomen so that they will use the lower part of their lungs, and also strengthens the back, where he finds they are generally weak. So they are instructed in principles of hygiene. But "breathing is the most important of all," he says, and they can throw off a great many ailments by proper habits in this regard. He teaches largely without the use of apparatus,

introducing and inventing exercises that give variety, life, and interest, and the spirit of play to the work. The whole secret of success, he declares, is "to make the work interesting and make play of it."

There is a regular athletic department connected with the club, with its own stationery and printed forms and notices. Each of the smaller individual clubs has its own baseball and football team. Tournaments are arranged every year providing a series of games between the different clubs, with a prize for the winning team. These games help to create strong club spirit in the individual clubs. A team will sometimes win because of the way the other members of the club hold together, support the captain, and encourage them by yelling, like enthusiastic and well-organized college rooters, to the discomfiture of the rival teams.

Anyone who has watched a crowd of boys playing ball in a vacant city lot, and has seen the wrangling that is sure to follow a close decision on a put-out, for example, will appreciate the educational benefit to the boys from a well-conducted game under the direction of an older person. Both teams and their respective captains understand the rules of the national game and abide by them. It must not be supposed, however, that this result was brought about at the first club game or the first annual tournament. It required gradual and continual hammering. If a quick-tempered, hot-headed boy commences excitedly to wave his bat and fist and let his tongue get the better of his judgment, where only his captain would have the right to talk, it offers a splendid opportunity for the manager or worker in charge to remind the lad of his proper place and the rules of the game. Then, at the first opportunity at the club, he can be quietly called aside and in a kind but effective way given a most impressive lesson on the evils of an ungovernable temper. These are "things that drive home," says the manager. It furnishes a good point of attack on an untamed child, and "often the only one you can get." Marked changes have been gradually brought about in the character of many of the boys in just this way. There is no swearing at the game, which is something

remarkable. It is very difficult to get a good game "without kicking," the manager says, with any outside baseball team. One of the rules is that no regular team game shall be played without the presence of some of the workers. Often five or six or more accompany their particular club out to the field, and enjoy the game and excitement as much as the boys. One "must not make the mistake of supposing that boys are not boys," says Mr. Peixotto. "They are unformed and unreasonable to a large degree, but are held by their love and respect for their advisers."

The same remarks apply to their football games and track athletics. They also have their whole-club teams, which play in amateur athletic tournaments with other associations or schools. The equipment is in all cases complete in the uniforms of the contending teams, masks, gloves, and all necessary paraphernalia.

The manager also takes bands of the boys out from time to time on picnics and excursions into the country. Here he finds an excellent opportunity to observe the individual character of the different boys. The last two summers he has been going with a large number of them on a camping trip to one of the big fruit ranches in California. The boys in this way secure a summer outing, and at the same time are enabled to pay their own way and perhaps make a little money besides by picking fruit, not to speak of having all the choicest fruit they want to eat.

The military department, already referred to, is also thoroughly organized and equipped.

The printing department is sometimes called by the manager the backbone of the club. It is most carefully conducted under his own supervision, and materially assists in carrying on all the several departments in the club organization in a systematic and businesslike manner. Each department is provided with its own individual stationery and printed forms, and regular printed notices or orders are issued in the several departments as necessity requires. Each of the smaller day and night clubs has an associate editor and reporter on the monthly *Club News*.

As a means of keeping the boys off the street corners and away from the influence of the saloons, and as Sunday is the only

day on which the working boys are free, the regular athletic tournaments for the older boys are played on that day. The boys are encouraged to come to the club house on Sunday evenings, when there are rarely less than fifty present, representing all the clubs. A lot of the big and little boys may always be seen on that evening gathered together with the manager and some of the workers in the front parlor. Here, with his arms around a couple of the boys, and a happy family of boys ranged in a circle around him, he or some of the others will tell stories, or they will talk over the exciting points in the last baseball game, or laughable adventures or hairbreadth escapes on the last summer's outing, etc., etc., till their eyes grow sleepy or they assemble about the piano to sing their favorite songs.

And thus the club lives and moves, vibrates with boyish fervor, year by year waxes stronger, becomes more fixed in the hearts of its members, more sure of what it can do to uplift and upbuild them. An entirely new atmosphere is created in which the boy lives and breathes. Absolutely changed conditions that are refining and strengthening are built up round about him. The subtle yet powerful influence of suggestion and example from cultured sources plays about him like a gentle breeze. "In reviewing our experiences," says a report of the board of managers, "we cannot fail to recognize that many of the boys whom we regarded at first as beyond our assistance or control have suddenly come within the spell of this gentle, civilizing power which environs and elevates them."

It will readily be surmised from what has been said how much the club depends for its success upon the character of the manager. His touch is felt in every department. There is known to be one man at the head to see to the success of every feature of the work. He has taken up this vocation because his heart is in it, and not for the salary which it yields.

The club is supported by the Emanu-El Sisterhood of San Francisco and private contributions and membership dues in the Columbia Park Boys' Club Association. The boys themselves pay no dues or fees whatever for membership. There is a board of managers which looks after the financial side of the club's life, but the internal affairs are left practically without outside

interference in the hands of the manager. He has the sole power to admit new members, or to discipline or expel any boys where he deems it necessary, for their punishment or the good of the club. This is a matter naturally calling for great tact, good judgment, firmness, and decision. It may be necessary at a critical point in the life of the club to show that the club spirit is stronger than the fitful will or caprice of any one boy, however popular he may be with the rest of the members. This is important. It is regarded as one of the most hopeful signs that the strength of the club has been demonstrated more than once in this manner. Club spirit and the wise and benevolent leadership of an older person who makes the boys and the success of the club his life-study, take the place of gang rule or the untutored, undisciplined government of the boys' own whims and passions. There is one instance in the history of the Columbia Park Boys' Club in which one boy was expelled and reinstated again three times. He is now one of the strongest and staunchest members of the club.

One of the most important and difficult problems in boys' club work is that of securing competent and faithful workers. This difficulty is experienced in settlement work with boys as well as in churches in interesting and holding competent teachers in the Sunday schools. It is particularly difficult to get men workers.

In the Columbia Park Boys' Club the manager has the sole power to select and place the workers, or, if necessary, to discipline them. The problem of supply and selection is partly solved through the personality and presence of a permanent manager. A strong man with an idea naturally draws about himself kindred spirits who will throw themselves heartily into his work. It is partly solved through the inherent strength and value of the boys' work itself, which would naturally attract some men. And, further than this, the social atmosphere and club spirit present have a tendency to attract and hold those who get into it. The humanitarian feeling is, of course, also active and particularly determinative with the young women workers. The latter must be depended upon for the afternoon club meetings with the younger boys, and there is a grand place for them in

this. The evening meetings with the older and working boys, and most of the other activities, as in the athletic department, are conducted almost entirely by men. The advantage of this preponderance of the male element in boys' work cannot be too strongly emphasized. It is one of the things which help most to insure the success of this club.

We have not yet enumerated all of the channels through which the club makes its influence felt in the lives of its members. It would require too much space, however, to go into further details on these matters here. It will serve our purpose merely to mention a few other important relations, such as that of the club to the homes and families of the boys. The mothers show a fine spirit in their interest in the club and in sending their boys to it. There is always a waiting list. Great possibilities are offered to the manager in directing the education of the individual boys in the public day and night schools, and often in keeping them in school even when they hate it. Equally, if not more, important are his services in guiding them in the choice of a vocation and aiding them to secure good positions where they may have a chance to rise.

In this connection an idea conceived by Mr. Peixotto for training boys who show talent for the arts and crafts is deserving of more than passing mention. His ambition is to found first an art press. This would not be directly connected with the club, and yet would have its offices either on the club premises or in close proximity to them. Here young men of talent would be gradually trained in artistic printing and original designing from early boyhood. Such a plan, if backed by capital, could undoubtedly be made a profitable venture at the present time right from the start. He would afterward extend the idea into other branches of the arts and crafts by the establishment of strong workshops near the club. "I want to see the boys hold together as they grow older," says Mr. Peixotto, "and show them how they can make their living together, just as they have had their pleasures together. A good half of the output of the club would be in pretty good shape for industrial work. In two years there will be twenty-five club boys at the Lick and

Wilmerding polytechnic schools in San Francisco learning iron-working and wood-working trades. It would be a fine thing to have them come out all skilled workmen." This is one of the strong lines of development to which Mr. Peixotto looks forward.

Another line of endeavor which he has in mind is the future opening of a second club house for the older boys. These boys could be interested in politics and the betterment of the neighborhood. "The whole problem is to keep hold of the boys in their larger and more manly interests as they grow older, just as you take hold of their boyish interests when they are boys." This plan, Mr. Peixotto thinks, "would be the realization of the settlement problem. A force of twenty trained boys would be irresistible in the neighborhood. *It is impossible to establish such a thing, but it is possible to grow or raise one.*"

It may not have occurred to many young men that a grand vocation is offered to them in this field that is superior in many respects to ministerial work or teaching. But a man should feel a calling for the work and be assured that he is fitted for it. It is deserving to be backed financially as strongly as the churches or public schools.

One other difficult and important problem must be spoken of before we conclude. It is that of religious instruction, and of educating boys to a practical sense of individual responsibility in all their acts and undertakings. The problem brings us to the question of the relationship of the individual with higher authority than anything merely of this world or the present moment; in short, his relationship with God.

The public school has apparently not succeeded in working out this problem. The Sunday school fails to get hold of the boy. Space will forbid going into details on this subject here, but I may be permitted to say that I think much can be done toward the desired end in this matter, both by the power of personal influence and example, and by strong, direct instruction of the right sort, beginning with the kindergarten and working up through the boys' club.

VICTOR L. O'BRIEN.